



Testimony of

Carol Gale, President

Hartford Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1018

Oppose: SB 1096 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS.

Support: HB 6763 AN ACT CONCERNING AN AUDIT OF THE STATE-WIDE MASTERY EXAMINATION.

Support: SB 1093 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CONCERNING EDUCATION.

Education Committee

March 1, 2023

Dear Senator McCory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Carol Gale and I live in Hartford, CT. I am the president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT), a union of school professionals which is here to support Connecticut's students. Our organization represents approximately 2000 members in the state. Prior to leading the HFT, I taught in the Hartford Public School System for 30 years. I'm a member of Recovery For All—a statewide coalition bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations across Connecticut.

I urge you to support [HB 6763](#) because this bill will empower educators to “teach beyond the test” and create assessments that are appropriate for our students.

I support [SB 1093](#) because students deserve smaller class sizes. This bill would limit class size to 20 students (PreK- Grade 2), 23 students (Grades 3-8) and 25 students (Grades 9-12).

I urge you to oppose [SB 1096](#) which would take away our democratic oversight over the approval and funding of new charter schools. Keep the existing process, which gives the public and elected legislators a voice. Instead of taking funds out of our schools to fast-track the creation of new charter schools, the legislature should fully fund and staff our schools.

I began teaching when the district gave one standardized test each year. Then came No Child Left Behind and the rise of standardized assessments culminating in the current climate where students receive so many tests there is not enough instructional time to adequately prepare them for the tests they have to take. Best educational practices mean that assessments should accurately reflect what was taught. This does not occur with standardized testing. Instead, students stare at test questions that do not match their daily classroom experiences and experience anxiety, frustration, fear of failing, and shame. As a result of these negative feelings, I have seen students put their heads down in quiet resignation, disrupt a testing environment, make wild guesses rather than try to determine an answer,



walk out of a testing room, and fall asleep to avoid the test. Thus, scores do not accurately represent a student's skill level, so much as their social-emotional state. Additionally, as a social studies teacher I am dismayed at the reduction or elimination of the humanities in order to focus on the heavily tested subjects of reading and math. The Center on Education Policy reported that "44% of districts cut time from activities such as social studies, science, art, music, physical education, lunch, and recess after NCLB." A number of studies also noted that overemphasis on standardized testing preparation resulted in a decrease in higher-order learning and engagement "in more complex problem-solving skills."

As an educator, I have decades of first hand experience teaching classes of all sizes. There is a distinct difference between teaching a fourth grade class of 21 students versus a fourth grade class of 28 students. Students deserve a teacher's attention to address their individual needs, and in classes of 25 students or more, this becomes increasingly difficult. Struggling students experiencing frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and lacking the attention they need academically will often use behavioral disruptions as a cry for the help they need and deserve. For every additional student, class interpersonal interactions increase exponentially making classroom management more challenging and creating more opportunities for learning disruptions due to behavior. During hybrid learning due to the covid pandemic of 2020, Hartford Public Schools held classes of no more than 14 students. The HFT received little to no calls for assistance related to classroom management and behavioral disruptions. By contrast, since the return to fully in-person learning when class sizes went back to normal (23, 27, or 28 depending on grade level) teacher complaints over behavioral challenges come in regularly. Educators were well aware of the increased social and emotional needs students had post pandemic and urged a reduction in class size to address it. There has been no change to our class size limits, yet there has been an increase in the number of staff members out on worker's comp due to injuries sustained while managing disruptive student behavior. The benefits of smaller class sizes are substantiated in many research studies including:

- Improved odds of graduating from high school by about 80%. Finn et al (2005).
- Increased probability of a student attending college. Iynarski et al (2013)
- Students were more engaged and less disruptive in the classroom. Bascia (2010)
- Improved teacher morale, higher rates of teacher attendance, reduced costs for substitute teachers and less teacher attrition. Pennsylvania State Education Association (2008)

Finally, instead of taking funds out of our schools to fast-track the creation of new charter schools, the legislature should fully fund and staff our public schools. The existing process, established in 2015, gives the public and elected legislators a voice because the charter school process was not transparent. SB 1096 would silence our voice. That is a step back instead of forward. We need more transparency and accountability of charter schools, not less.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB 6763 and SB 1093, and to oppose SB 1096. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Carol Gale
Hartford, CT